

Principle Number Two
Plain Language
All Provider Types

Best Writing Practices

The best practices to follow when writing include:

- Put all relevant facts in chronological order.
 - Chronological order means the order in which it happened to the resident-not the order in which it happened for the surveyor.
- Keep sentences short.
- Use simple sentence structure.
- Use active voice.
- Avoid undefined abbreviations, initials, and technical jargon.
 - Do not use the section letters of the Minimum Data Set (MDS) without a description of what that section covers.
 - Write in Plain Language.
- Avoid unnecessary words, e.g., Nurse #2...and Nurse #2...., twice in same sentence.
- Avoid vague terminology (“seemed” “appeared” “sometimes” “small” “timely”); instead be specific and detailed.
- Avoid words that imply or state conclusions without including the facts to support them (e.g., “only” “just” “timely” “inadequate” “appropriate”).
- Ensure the accuracy of quoted material. (Use exact words as spoken.)

Active Voice Versus Passive Voice

Most writing manuals recommend active voice over passive voice. Sentences in active voice are generally clearer and more direct than those in passive voice. Your goal as a writer is to get to the point quickly and efficiently. You want it to be as easy to read as possible.

What is active voice?

- Active voice means that the subject performs the action.
- Passive voice occurs when the one performing the action is not the subject.
- Your writing will be short, concise, and clear if you use the active voice.
 - Active: He fooled her.
 - Passive: She was fooled by him.

What is wrong with passive writing?

- Passive writing can create awkward sentences. The reader may find passive writing uninteresting or too difficult to understand.
- Active writing is a skill learned by authors to make their work direct, gripping, and action-packed.
- Active voice will improve your credibility because you are talking to the reader instead of at the reader. Whether they are aware of it or not, readers prefer active voice because it decreases the amount of mental work required for understanding the text.

Examples:

Passive voice

- During an interview with the Director of Nursing at 3:10 PM on 03/18/XX, the Director of Nursing said, “I would expect the nurse to notify the physician of a fall with injuries.”

Active voice

- During an interview at 3:10 PM on 03/18/XX, the Director of Nursing said, “I would expect the nurse to notify the physician of a fall with injuries.”

Other reminders:

- Be careful about sentence structure.
 - The interdisciplinary notes, dated 03/18/08, **stated** the urine of Resident two was dark and cloudy yellow in color.
- When reviewing a record, do not put the date that it was reviewed it unless absolutely necessary. It is just one more date for the reader to sift through.
- Write in past tense unless quoting someone. Resident #1 was on the Alzheimer’s unit (a unit for those residents who...).
- Avoid phrases like, “the following was observed:” or “was observed to...” and “was noted to be...”
- Stick to just the necessary information. If it does not apply, leave it out.